

COLUMNS

Luxury Unfiltered: Why standard operating procedures are luxury's billion-dollar mistake

January 7, 2026

*Daniel Langer is the founder and CEO of consulting firm quit*

By **Daniel Langer**

Standard operating procedures are the enemy of luxury.

This might sound counterintuitive to a chief operating officer who is obsessed with consistency. But in the world of extreme value creation, you cannot standardize emotion.

The moment a staff member recites a script, the magic dies.

The knowledge gap

We need to stop teaching memorization and start teaching improvisation. This is the hardest shift for legacy brands to make.

For decades, the industry has operated on a factory model. We defined the steps of service.

We wrote scripts. We audited compliance.

This works perfectly for a fast-food chain where the goal is efficiency and predictability. But luxury is not about predictability.

It is about surprise. It is about the human connection that happens in the unscripted moments between the steps.

The root of the problem is a fundamental misunderstanding of what luxury actually is. I recently had a conversation with the CEO of a luxury brand who asked why, despite a high Net Promoter Score, loyalty was low.

After doing some research on their data, the answer became clear: they simply measured compliance with operational standards. They did not measure emotional satisfaction.

This was why loyalty tanked. In a different recent project in Asia, I could show that matching the operational standards of a pre-defined customer journey often achieves the opposite of the intention: it feels like being handed over from station to station.

The magic of luxury is not in the "what" but in the "how." This requires radically different thinking.

I conduct strategy sessions and trainings for luxury brands all over the world. I work with C-level boards and frontline teams.

My observation is consistent and alarming. In nearly all of these sessions, the participants did not know the hidden psychological

luxury value drivers of their own category.

In other words, they were focusing the effort of their organizations on the wrong areas.

Whether I am in Shanghai, Paris, Abu Dhabi or New York, the confusion is the same. Many executives and staff still confuse luxury with product features.

They have a “more is more” mindset. They believe that if they explain the craftsmanship, the materials, or the heritage long enough, the client will buy.

This is a fallacy. Clients do not buy luxury for the features.

They take the features for granted. They buy luxury for the transformative effect the brand story has on them.

They buy the way the brand makes them feel about themselves. If we speak about features, we must talk about them through an emotional lens.

The cost of getting it wrong

Because of these misunderstandings, organizations are wasting millions of dollars on the wrong messages. Marketing campaigns focus on specs rather than dreams.

Sales associates are trained to be walking encyclopedias rather than emotional experts and create transactional realities often without even noticing.

The financial impact is devastating. I estimate that brands lose billions in revenue and profit annually simply because they fail to unlock the true power of luxury.

They are selling high-quality products, but they are failing to create extreme value. If your staff merely repeats a script or lists product features without the emotional context, they are redundant.

In a digital world where clients have already done their research online before entering the store, a script adds zero value. To win, you need a team that understands the psychology of luxury.

They need the confidence to throw away the manual and have a real human conversation.

The training revolution

This is why training on luxury psychology is the most critical investment a brand can make today. But it has to be done right.

Traditional training is functional. It teaches you what to do.

Transformational training is psychological. It teaches you why it matters and how to feel.

I have seen the results of this shift firsthand in my own masterclasses. When teams understand that they are not selling a bag but a feeling of empowerment, their entire demeanor changes.

They become more confident. They stop transacting and start connecting.

The conversion rates go up. The retention rates go up.

Importantly, they feel much more passionate and confident.

The verdict

It is time to burn the old operational rulebook. It is crap.

In 2026, the brands that rely on Standard Operating Procedures will feel safe, but they will be boring. And in luxury boring is lethal.

As I have often stated. Playing it safe is playing to lose.

The winners will be the organizations that invest in the minds of their people. It has the highest ROI.

They will equip their teams with the psychological tools to improvise, to connect and to create magic. If you are not training for the psychological foundation and for emotion, you are not training for luxury.

Are you ready?

Luxury Unfiltered is a weekly column by *Daniel Langer*. He is the CEO of *quit*, a global luxury strategy and creative brand activation firm, where he is the advisor to some of the most iconic luxury brands. He is recognized as a global top-five luxury key opinion leader. He serves as the executive professor of luxury strategy and pricing at Pepperdine University in Malibu and as a professor of luxury at New York University, New York. Dr. Langer has authored best-selling books on luxury management in English and Chinese and is a respected global keynote speaker.

Dr. Langer conducts masterclass management training on various luxury topics around the world. As a luxury expert featured on Bloomberg TV, Financial Times, The New York Times, Forbes, The Economist and others, Mr. Langer holds an MBA and a Ph.D. in luxury management and has received education from Harvard Business School. Follow him on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#), and listen to his **Future of Luxury Podcast**.

© 2026 Reliance Relocation Services, Inc. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.